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THE

# STAGE;

A POETICAL EPISTLE,

TO A FRIEND.

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By W. WOTY.

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# The STAGE.

## *A Poetical Epiſtle to a Friend.*

YES, with an iron Rod you laſh the Stage,
Forgetting, that in this you laſh the Age,
Drawcanſir like, exhauſt without Regard,
Your wrath on Actor, Manager, and Bard.
But tho' their Conduct harſhly you defame,
Candor dares vouch, that neither is to blame.
Such as the Congreſs are, who hear and ſee,
Will Actor, Manager, and Author be.

'Tis public Taſte, that ever muſt controul,
The Drama's motions, and direct the whole.
Sterling, or baſe, as that may chance to prove,
Th' accordant Currency will ſtop, or move.

Through balmy meadows, fring'd with many a flow'r
Where friendly Nature ſheds her fertile ſhow'r,
The muddy ſtream creeps ſluggiſhly along,
Too dull to animate the Poet's ſong;
At this you wonder—but vouchſafe to tread
Your footſteps backwards to the fountain's head,
Limpid, or foul, the ſtream will be the ſame,
True to the faithful Urn, from whence it came.

Alike it fares with thoſe, who write or play:
They muſt conſult the Mirror of the day,
Adapt their looks to Faſhion's glaring light,
No matter, if the glaſs be wrong, or right.

Unhappy he! to pleaſe a childiſh Age,
Who waſtes his parts, and Credit on the Stage,
Forc'd to expoſe the Trinkets of the mind,
And leave the gems, the precious gems behind.
Genius no more then darts his dazzling rays,
But lies, ſweet *Nonſenſe!* ſmother'd in thy blaze.

THOU! darling of the Times! to thee belong
The Eunuch's warble, and unmanly ſong,

The turgid Tragedy of ahs! and ohs!
Where not one ſpark of genuine Nature glows,
Cold Comedy, that ſomething *would* expreſs,
Where Humour freezes in Tranſlation's Dreſs,
Whilſt Wit, whoſe glance once awed the Villain's pride,
Drops the dead eye, and ſtiffens by her ſide.

The mighty Range of SHAKESPEARE'S god-like mind,
Who left e'en Nature in the Race behind,
That, like a doting Mother ſtop'd, and ſmil'd,
Pleas'd to be vanquiſh'd by her fondling Child.
The varied Notes of DRYDEN'S magic lyre,
Whoſe ſounds harmonious ſet the Soul on fire;
The plaintive ſtrains of OTWAY'S tender Muſe,
Who could at will ſoft pity's warmth infuſe,
From ſavage eyes the trickling Sorrow ſteal,
Strike on the Nerves, and make the Heart-ſtrings feel,
Ill-fated bard!—the happy thoughts that flow
In liquid language from enchanting ROWE,
The fire, and Senſibility of LEE,
Whoſe Beauties claſs him in the firſt degree,
Whoſe daring Courſer, when the common track
He ſpurn'd at random, always brought him back,

With other Spirits of illuſtrious Fame
Well-known, and needleſs for the Muſe to name,
Theſe are no more. The Public form the twine
Of Bays for *Harlequin* and *Columbine*,
To Wit and *Congreve* farce and ſong prefer,
As if on purpoſe they deſign'd to err,
Humour and *Vanbrugh* muſt give place to Sound,
Such is the trifling Taſte in Folly's Round.

See! where the Fools of Quality appear,
Whoſe Underſtanding centres in the Ear.
Charm'd with the Trills of an *Italian* throat,
As if they knew the language and the Note,
They dance their empty Noddles to and fro,
Enough for them, poor things! to ſeem to know.

In vain for them the Tear of pity flows,
They cannot taſte imaginary Woes.
'Tis real Grief alone, that dews their eyes
When colic-ſick a fav'rite lap-dog lies.
But that's allay'd, when proof of high regard!
They firſt receive the dear, condoling Card.

The Servant runs the Doctor's Aid to beg,
But in returning falls, and breaks his Leg.
Ne'er mind the Leg, my Lord and Lady cry,
If *Celſus* comes, and *Pompey* does not die.

What Bard would write, when ſuch the Judges are!
What ſkilful Actor his Exertions dare!
Vain may the Actor and the Poet join,
And like true friends, their mutual force combine.
If but a *Veſtris* ſhake his agile toe,
Or fops import ſome foreign Raree-ſhow,
Who will for them, to Senſe of feeling dead,
May take a SHAKESPEARE'S, or a GARRICK'S Head.

SHADE of the former! pardon, when I join
His favor'd Name in the ſame Verſe with thine.
In all thy Scenes that dignify the Stage,
His Action beſt explain'd thy matchleſs page.
One look from him convey'd thy Meaning more,
Than all the Notes thy Critics had in ſtore.

And let not here the rigid man of phlegm
Raſhly the Players, or the Plays condemn.

Is there an Actor, who ſuſtains his part
With blameleſs conduct, deſtitute of Art,
In private life, maintaining Virtue's cauſe,
No Actor here—that man deſerves Applauſe.
Some ſuch there are, whoſe ſelf-approving hour
Tranſcends the limit of the Muſe's pow'r.

But tho' the Actor and the Poet join,
Walk hand in hand to Fame's immortal ſhrine,
Death parts their friendly travel in the end,
Nor gives their ſhining Talents more to blend.
Freſh round the Poet's grave the Laurel grows,
And o'er his Turf a pleaſing ſhadow throws,
Whilſt o'er the Actor's periſhable Tomb,
A wither'd Cypreſs only marks his Doom.
His Charms the one continues to renew,
And one is clos'd for ever from the View.

Of this no more—the Time may yet revive
To keep Pit, Box, and Gallery alive,
When Poſture-maſters may diſtort the frame,
Screw up their limbs, and tumble into fame,

When

When ſome may ſwing upon the flexile wire,
And ſome, a match for *Vulcan*, ſwallow fire,
Monkies may dance to pleaſe the human flock,
And triumph o'er the Buſkin, and the Sock.

Rouze! Britons, rouze! and baniſh from the Scene,
Dumb ſhows, and noiſe, the frivolous, and mean;
The uſeful Stage we then may hope to ſee,
The School of Virtue, as it ought to be.
Strike out the Thoughts from ev'ry Author's page
Pen'd but to pleaſe a looſe, abandon'd Age,
Where can more noble Sentiments be found?
In perfect Uniſon the Senſe and Sound,
Where puniſh'd Vice in anguiſh bites the Earth,
And Folly flinches at the ſhaft of Mirth,
Where Virtue ſmiles, nor knows a ſingle fear,
And Pity gives to Grief the healing tear,
Where comes Inſtruction, and the more to pleaſe,
Comes in the veſtment of poetic eaſe,
Where Truth ſublime, deſcending from the ſky,
Expands her Book of Ethics to the eye,
Where, ſtrengthen'd by the ſage Hiſtorian's mind,
Stands broad to view, the Volume of Mankind.

Nor let grave Prieſts, whom I to all preſer,
When Meekneſs marks their ſacred Character;
Nor let grave Prieſts the Muſe prophane eſteem,
Tho' ſhe has choſen this unhallow'd Theme.
For next the Pulpit doth a virtuous Stage
Convey the pureſt Leſſons to the Age.

But Reformation can the Stage expect!
When thoſe, who ought to patronize, neglect.
Where 'mongſt the Great in Education's Sphere
Doth ORMOND, DORSET, HALLIFAX appear!
Thoſe Orbs of Taſte, beneath whoſe ample blaze
DRYDEN ſhone forth with more illumin'd rays.
True Genius then majeſtically dar'd
Enough to frighten ev'ry modern Bard,
That, like a mighty flood with fury fraught
Roll'd the reſiſtleſs Cataract of Thought,
Tho' now it flows an even, paſſive ſtream,
To welcome Slumber, and invite the dream.
'True Genius, tho' inhum'd, lives after death
When all the Critics have reſign'd their breath.
His fame ſurviving ſtill does DRYDEN keep,
And POPE's awake, tho' *Dennis* is aſleep.

But

But now no Patrons raiſe the Poet's head,
Or call forth Merit from her humble ſhed.
A coaxing Proſtitute, or ſparkling Toy,
Almoſt completes the ſummit of their Joy.

Our Nobles now to Climes exotic roam,
And travel, but to travel from their home.
They pay their Viſits to the Continent,
Returning juſt as wiſe, as when they went.
No more—unleſs to bring a Toothpick back,
Or ſome important, luſory Knick-knack;
Perhaps a Cookling to debauch the Taſte,
And let their Wealth, and Kitchens run to waſte,
Or half-ſtarv'd Wretch his Friends could not endure
To dreſs their flimſy pates—a pert Friſeur,
Aſk them the Hiſt'ry—Cuſtoms of a place,
Confus'd they ſtare with an inſipid face,
But talk of Sing-ſong, and of Opera dance,
The *Gamut's* all the learning they advance.

Are theſe the Men to rule the public taſte?
If ſo, the Stage will not reform in haſte.

Actors full oft, tho' not with much delight,
Have bluſh'd to ſpeak, what Authors bluſh'd to write.
You'll archly aſk this Queſtion, friend, I fear:
Pray did the Boxes never bluſh to hear?
O no—they love ſweet Nonſenſe it is known,
As bord'ring near a province of their own,
Or ſhould they bluſh, the Colour is ſo faint,
You ſcarce can ſee it through the Veil of Paint.

Till Education purifies the Mind,
Of thoſe, who ought to civilize Mankind,
Men of exalted Rank, whoſe ample Worth
Should keep due pace with their exalted Birth,
The Stage muſt in its motley ſtate remain,
A Proof, that Taſte hath not ſecur'd her Reign,
Whilſt Senſe is hiſs'd, and Acclamation rings
The praiſe of gew-gaws, and of fiddle-ſtrings.

11. 7. 49

FINIS.